

Philips Dictation Systems

Success Story: Sheriff's Department saves time and travel time for officers with Pocket Memo 9350s

Challenge

The Duluth, Minnesota Sheriff's Department of St. Louis County faced a logistics problem when the patrol division was moved several miles away from the clerical department. Since the county is particularly large, it was time-consuming and inconvenient for the officers to deliver tapes to the office for transcription or come in at the end of a shift to record their dictations. The officers had older tape-based units that were heavy and bulky and the sound quality was poor. Many of the officers preferred not to use the units, but instead drove to the clerical office daily to sit at a dictation station to record their case files, then deliver the tape to the clerical unit in another part of the building. As a result, they were driving many more miles per day and spending unproductive time away from their jobs to complete and deliver their dictations.

Interviews conducted in detention facilities were also a challenge because the acoustics in the interview rooms were poor and the taped recordings were very difficult to transcribe. The transcriptionists had to replay the tapes many times to decipher each word and dreaded having to transcribe these recordings because it was difficult and time-consuming.

Although a few tapes were re-useable, most of the tapes were stored and archived for legal purposes. Increasing expenses, storage space, labeling, cataloging and retrieving the tapes became more pressing issues because of the many tapes that must be archived each month, along with the hundreds of existing tapes accumulated throughout the years.

Solution

Sheila Ballavance, Supervisor of the Criminal Records Division, consulted another law enforcement agency in the area that had recently implemented a digital solution. Based on her department's needs for a digital solution that would give the deputies a mobile solution, and with the recommendation from other local agencies, Sheila proposed a pilot program to Undersheriff David Phillips. It was approved, but because annual funding was limited, each of the three county offices would be implemented in stages, pending the outcome of the pilot project. It was decided to first equip the deputy staff and the investigation department of the Duluth office with 50 Digital Pocket Memo® 9350s.

Sheila observed that many of the officers were apprehensive about using the digital units. Since there was no tape to take out and deliver, they were afraid that their dictations might become lost during the download process. Many of them wanted to record on a tape also as a backup because they were so used to having that tape in their hand. "There was a learning curve for everyone," said Sheila, "but now that they've been using their Pocket Memos, they are much more comfortable dictating and they like being able to download their files. It's saving everyone an enormous amount of time."



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All of the computers and clerical staff were equipped with download cables so the deputies can record their notes on their Pocket Memos after each incident. Then, when they are at one of the computers or at the end of a shift, they simply download their dictations directly to the clerical department, which takes only a few seconds. They can now record notes immediately after an incident rather than having to take written notes and reconstruct them at the end of the workday. Also, they can now record telephone conversations easily from any telephone, which they were not able to do with the tape-based system unless they were in the central office.

Benefits

“Although a cost-saving analysis has not yet been conducted, we know we will definitely save on time and travel for the officers. They can be out doing what they need to be doing, not transporting tapes. Now they can dictate in their cars, go to any office, just plug it in, download and out they go again,” said Sheila.

The transcriptionists have reported that the sound quality of the Pocket Memos is exceptional. Sheila stated, “Not only are the officers’ recordings more clear, but the recordings made in the interview room of the detention center are excellent. The Pocket Memo picks up the voice but doesn’t pick up the echoes and extraneous noises. It’s miraculous! The transcriptionists are more than pleased—they really love it. They no longer dread having to transcribe these recordings.”

Because they will not be purchasing tapes, the problem of storing, cataloging and retrieving tapes will be eliminated. The digital recordings will be stored on servers and then eventually archived on disks. “It will be much easier to store and retrieve recordings from the same case files. It was much more complicated and time-consuming with tapes,” stated Sheila. Because the digital multimedia cards are re-usable, they anticipate that the purchases of new or replacement cards will be minimal.

Because interview tapes are kept for evidence, a prosecuting attorney would occasionally ask to hear a taped recording. Although it had been transcribed, it did not convey the tone or inflection of the voice and there was always a slight possibility that a transcribed copy may contain errors and the recording could often be unclear. Digital recordings can be easily emailed for review, and the sound quality is so much better than the tapes. There was also skepticism that perhaps the CDs could be altered and whether they would be acceptable as evidence in court. “We worked with the county attorney to address his apprehensions about presenting digital recordings to the court. After a thorough review, the court has now accepted digital copies of recordings, along with the paper typed transcription, as evidence,” reported Sheila.

When Sheila and David Phillips, Undersheriff of St. Louis County, were considering the purchase of a digital system, they brought in Dan Meyer of Chader Voice Technology, who introduced them to the Pocket Memo 9350s. They invited a few officers to sit in on the presentation. One of the officers remarked that the unit looked fragile because they were small and lightweight. Sheila recounted the demonstration, saying “Dan took his unit and winged it on the floor, picked it up and continued to dictate, then played it back—the unit was fine and the recording was perfect. I think at that point, we knew we would purchase these units because we knew they would stand up to the rigorous treatment they would get from the officers in the field”



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The pilot program has been an overwhelming success and that the 9350s will be purchased for the other county offices as planned.

For more information, visit <http://www.dictation.philips.com> or contact:

- Vickie Hanson, Philips Dictation Systems, Business Development/Marketing Services Manager at Vickie.hanson@philips.com or 770-821-2259.
- Sheila Ballavance, Supervisor of Criminal Records Division, Duluth, Minnesota Sheriff's Department, St. Louis County at ballavances@co.st-louis.mn.us or 218-726-2360
- David Phillips, Undersheriff of Duluth, Minnesota Sheriff's Department, St. Louis County at phillipsd@co.st-louis.mn.us or 218-726-0000
- Dan Meyer, Regional Manager, Chader Voice Technology, Waite Park, MN, dmeyer@chader.com, or 320-251-0944.

